

# LANDOWNERS



## LEGISLATIVE • ALERT



### NATIONAL

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**B**Y THE TIME you read this, the first session of the 106th Congress will be over. As has become the norm in recent years, Congress has had difficulty in completing the 13 annual spending bills, or appropriations bills, that fund all federal discretionary programs in this country on time. This includes the Interior Appropriations bill which funds the USDA-Forest Service and provides the primary federal funding for State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs.

The road for the Interior appropriations bill has been its usual rough and tumble ride, but the S&PF programs under the Forest Service weathered it fairly well. For the year, Congress is proposing to fund S&PF at a level of \$188 million, an impressive 10 percent increase over last year's level of \$171 million. This is particularly noteworthy considering the self-imposed tight spending caps developed back in 1997 to balance the budget and maintain the solvency of social security. Here's a look at what will likely be coming down the pipe in fiscal year 2000 for forest landowner assistance programs under State & Private Forestry, as well as some program background.

#### Forest Landowner Assistance Programs

There are three primary landowner assistance programs administered by the Forest Service and implemented by the state foresters: the Forest Stewardship

Program, the Stewardship Incentives Program and the Forestry Incentives Program. All three are likely to maintain their fiscal year 1999 funding levels into 2000.

The *Forest Stewardship Program* (FSP) is the backbone of the forest landowner assistance programs offered by the Forest Service. The program is designed to assist non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners more actively manage their forests and related resources. This includes keeping these lands in a productive and healthy condition so economic and environmental benefits can be had for present and future generations. This translates to on-the-ground action through technical assistance and development of forest management plans.

The compliment to the FSP is the *Stewardship Incentives Program* (SIP). SIP provides NIPF landowners financial assistance to implement many of the management activities laid out in an FSP management plan. The cost-share program provides up to 75 percent of the costs for such activities as reforestation, afforestation, forest improvement, and a myriad of wetland and riparian area, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat protection improvements.

For FY 2000, the FSP is slated to receive a small \$600,000 increase that is mostly an inflationary adjustment, but is proof of Congress' dedication to the valued program. This brings the total funding level for FSP to \$29.430 million.

Unfortunately, for the second straight year, the SIP has been zeroed out, meaning that no funding will be available.

This lack of support has surprised a few and has led to early discussions of revamping the program and/or developing a new federal cost-share assistance program that would meet the changing needs of the NIPF landowner. The state foresters plan on playing a significant role in any future program and will remain engaged in the policy development.

The other primary landowner assistance program is the *Forestry Incentives Program* (FIP). The FIP is jointly administered by the USDA-Forest Service and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and implemented at the ground level by the state foresters. This program is primarily a cost-share program, but unlike the SIP, monies are directed at assisting NIPF landowners defray the costs of making long-term investments in tree planting, forest stand improvement, and site preparation for timber operations.

The FIP, very popular in the southern states, will stay flat for fiscal year 2000 at \$6.325 million. At first glance this looks to be a decrease from last year's level of \$16.325 million, but \$10 million of last year's appropriation was marked as emergency spending in response to terrible drought conditions in 1998 that resulted in tree planting failures across much of the South.

The other program of interest to private forest landowners also did well. Programs to fund rural firefighting received modest increases. These programs help the Forestry Commission to work with—and equip—rural volunteer fire departments that are responsible for firefighting on most of Alabama's private forestlands. Forest health protection, which includes federal help to the states to detect and suppress forest pests such as the Southern pine beetle, also received substantial funding increases.

Overall, forest landowner assistance programs fared quite well through the fiscal year 2000 appropriations process. Numbers were not quite as high as NASF would have liked, but support for basic S&PF programs does appear to be growing in Congress right now and NASF will be working hard to ensure that forest landowners get the assistance they need. ♣